



Northern Ireland  
Assembly

# Public Accounts Committee

## Minutes of Proceedings

Thursday, 6 May 2021

**Meeting Location:** The Senate, Parliament Buildings, Belfast

**Present:** Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA (Chairperson)  
Mr Roy Beggs MLA (Deputy Chairperson)  
Mr Harry Harvey MLA  
David Hilditch MLA

**Present by Video or Teleconference:**

Mr Cathal Boylan MLA  
Ms Órlaithí Flynn MLA  
Mr Andrew Muir MLA  
Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA  
Mr Matthew O'Toole MLA

**Apologies:** None

**In Attendance:** Ms Lucia Wilson (Assembly Clerk)  
Ms Gillian Barker (Assistant Assembly Clerk)

**In Attendance by Video or Teleconference:**

Ms Karen Barry (Clerical Supervisor)



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*The meeting commenced at 2.06 pm in Open Session*

**1. Apologies**

None

**2. Draft Minutes of 29 April 2021**

**Agreed:** The draft minutes of the meeting of 29 April 2021 were signed and agreed to be published.

**3. Declaration of Interest**

Mr Maolíosa McHugh MLA, declared he is Chairman of Naíscoil na Deirge, a pre-school through the medium of Irish and a registered charity.

**4. Matters Arising**

None

**5. Correspondence**

The following Officials joined the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB Comptroller & Auditor General (C&AG) for Northern Ireland Assembly (NIAO);



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Ms Colette Kane, Director, NIAO; and  
Mr Kyle Bingham Assembly Support Officer, NIAO joined the meeting  
remotely.

### **Trevor McKee – Charity Commission for Northern Ireland**

The Committee noted correspondence dated 27 April 2021 from Mr Trevor McKee, regarding decision by the Charity Tribunal for Northern Ireland to agree a hearing. The Committee noted that Mr McKee has copied his correspondence to NIAO and the Committee for Communities.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the correspondence.

### **Nicole Lappin, Chief Charity Commissioner, CCNI**

Following on from Mr McKee's correspondence of 27 April 2021 regarding the Charity Tribunal, the Committee noted correspondence dated 30 April 2021, from Nicole Lappin, Chief Charity Commissioner, CCNI, clarifying the Commissioners position on this matter.

The Committee noted the C&AG would be monitoring any wider implications for similar cases in relation to this court ruling.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the correspondence and C&AG's comments of the potential wider implications for other cases.

### **Mike Brennan AO DfE**

The Committee noted correspondence dated 4 May 2021 from Mr Mike Brennan, AO DfE, regarding 'Administration Costs of Covid Disruption Payment Scheme'. Mr Brennan outlined that the 10% allocated to cover any transaction fees incurred per student in administering the Covid Disruption Payment is a nominal cost; and the Department has the right to claim back whatever element of these notional administration costs is appropriate from the universities, once an assessment of the actual costs for each university has been carried out based on audited information.



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**Agreed:** The Committee noted the correspondence.

*The meeting remained in Open Session at 2.10 pm*

## 6. Ministerial Directions

The following Officials remained in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG NIAO;  
Mr Colette Kane, Director, NIAO; and  
Mr Kyle Bingham Assembly Support Officer, NIAO remotely

The Committee noted it would be considering three Ministerial Directions today of which two were historical; that is the schemes are closed. The Committee noted the C&AG is looking into the reasons why there has been a delay in a number of Ministerial Directions coming to the Committee from the Department for Economy.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to write to Mr Mike Brennan AO DfE to appear before the Committee to discuss a number of issues: the reason for the delay in forwarding the Ministerial Directions to C&AG; to ask for further clarification on recent correspondence in relation to the inquiry into 'Generating Electricity from Renewable Energy'; and to receive an update on the York Street Belfast University Campus.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule this into the draft Forward Work Programme.

The Committee noted a response dated 6 May 2021 from the Audit Office regarding a query last week from Mr O'Toole on the DoF Ministerial Direction on "*Additional Financial Assistance Schemes to make use of the remaining 2020-21 COVID-19 Funding*". Mr O'Toole enquired if the £177.9 million expenditure relating to the three



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schemes covered by this Direction was the highest amount covered by a single COVID related Ministerial Direction to date.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the response from Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer, confirming this was the second highest; the other being £294 million regarding DfE £10k Business Support Grant Scheme.

### **1. Ministerial Direction: ‘Recognition Payment for Supporting People and Homelessness Sector Frontline staff’:**

The Committee noted correspondence dated 26 April 2021, from Mr Kieran Donnelly, C&AG regarding a Ministerial Direction – ‘Recognition Payment for Supporting People and Homelessness Sector Frontline staff’. The DfC Permanent Secretary wrote to the C&AG on 15 April 2021 to advise that she had sought a Ministerial Direction from the DfC Minister, Deirdre Hargey MLA, on 30 March 2021 to put in place arrangements to make one-off £500 payments to Supporting People and Homelessness sector staff in recognition of the work they have done during 2020-21 at a cost of £2.5 million.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the Ministerial Direction and that the C&AG will keep this matter under review, as the Audit of the 2020-21 financial statements progresses.

### **2. Ministerial Direction: ‘COVID RESTRICTIONS BUSINESS SUPPORT SCHEME’ (CRBSS).**

The Committee noted correspondence dated 4 May 2021, from Mr Kieran Donnelly, C&AG regarding a Ministerial Direction from the DfE Minister, Diane Dodds MLA, on 20 October 2020 to implement a scheme to provide support to local businesses and address the gaps in the DoF Local Restrictions Support Scheme (LRSS) which did not provide help to businesses that were forced to close but did not pay business rates, for example, hairdressers renting a chair in a salon, driving instructors and mobile beauticians.



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The Committee noted that the Scheme provides a grant of up to £800 per week for eligible businesses, falling within the central funding envelope, to provide financial support for businesses impacted by Covid.

The Committee noted the Department has stated it provided an email to the C&AG indicating notification had been sent to him on 4 November 2020, however C&AG does not have a record of receiving this email.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the Ministerial Direction and the relevant papers underpinning the decisions.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the C&AG will keep this matter under review as the Audit of the 2020-21 financial statements progresses; and that the C&AG is currently investigating why he did not get notification of the MD on or around 4 November 2020.

### **3. Ministerial Direction: Wet Pubs Business Support Scheme**

The Committee noted correspondence dated 4 May 2021, from Mr Kieran Donnelly, C&AG regarding a Ministerial Direction on 'Wet Pubs Business Support Scheme'. The Permanent Secretary, Mr Mike Brennan wrote to the C&AG on 20 April 2021 to advise that he had sought a ministerial direction from the DfE Minister, Diane Dodds MLA, on 11 December 2020 to implement a Wet Pubs Business Support Scheme (WPBSS).

The Committee noted the delay in the Department notifying the details of the Ministerial Direction to the C&AG and hence the delay in this correspondence to the Committee.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the Ministerial Direction and the relevant papers underpinning the decisions.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the C&AG will keep this matter under review as the Audit of the 2020-21 financial statements progresses; and that the C&AG is currently in discussion with the Department on what caused the delay and what actions they have taken to ensure this will not happen again.



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*The meeting went into Closed Session at 2.24 pm*

**7. Inquiry into Driver and Vehicle Agency 2019 - 2020 – Consideration of draft report**

The following Officials remained in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly CB C&AG NIAO;  
Mr Colette Kane, Director, NIAO;  
Ms Christine Burns, Senior Auditor;  
Ms Caroline Laird, Auditor; and  
Mr Kyle Bingham Assembly Support Officer, NIAO remotely

The Committee noted the draft report is classified as RESTRICTED and therefore for Members use only.

The Committee considered its draft report, 'Inquiry into Driver and Vehicle Agency 2019 – 2020' and agreed the title of the report is '**Report on Driver and Vehicle Agency 2019-20**'.

The Committee agreed the section on Membership and Powers and the List of Abbreviations.

The Committee made the following decisions regarding each section and paragraphs within the report, that is - Agreed; Agreed as amended; or, to be revised and brought back to the Committee. The Committee noted paragraph 9 was missing and paragraph numbers would be amended once the report has been agreed to be Ordered to Print.

**Executive Summary: Paragraphs 1 – 8**

Paragraph 1: Read and Agreed  
Paragraph 2: Read and Agreed



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Paragraph 3: Read and Agreed  
Paragraph 4: Read and Agreed  
Paragraph 5: Read and Agreed  
Paragraph 6: Read and Agreed  
Paragraph 7: Read and Agreed  
Paragraph 8: Read and Agreed

**Recommendations 1 - 3: Paragraphs 10 – 12**

Recommendation 1	Paragraph 10: To be revised and brought back to the Committee.
Recommendation 2	Paragraph 11: Read and Agreed as amended
Recommendation 3	Paragraph 12: Read and Agreed

The Committee agreed the wording of **ALL section titles** for the remainder of the report, covering paragraphs 13 - 40. Amendments to the paragraphs 13 - 40 are noted below under each section title.

**Section ‘Introduction’: Paragraph 13**

Paragraph 13: Read and Agreed

**Section ‘Background’: Paragraphs 14 - 22**

Paragraph 14: Read and Agreed  
Paragraph 15: Read and Agreed  
Paragraph 16: Read and Agreed  
Paragraph 17: Read and Agreed  
Paragraph 18: Read and Agreed  
Paragraph 19: Read and Agreed  
Paragraph 20: Read and Agreed as amended  
Paragraph 21: Read and Agreed  
Paragraph 22: Read and Agreed





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**Section Title: 'The DVA had not projected a life span for the scissor lifts and crucial management information on lift usage was not collated.'**

Paragraph 23: To be revised and brought back to the  
Committee

Paragraph 24: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 25: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 26: Read and Agreed

**Section Title: 'There was no phased asset replacement plan in place to mitigate disruption to service delivery.'**

Paragraph 27: To be revised and brought back to the  
Committee.

Paragraph 28: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 29: Read and Agreed

**Section Title: 'DVA relied heavily on MAHA and the Planned and Preventative Maintenance (PPM) schedule'.**

Paragraph 30: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 31: To be revised and brought back to the  
Committee.

Paragraph 32: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 33: Read and Agreed

**Section Title: 'MAHA was responsible for maintaining the lifts and also for arranging the inspections of the lifts.'**

Paragraph 34: Read and Agreed

Paragraph 35: Read and Agreed



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**Section Title: 'The contract for the supply and maintenance of the equipment has been extended through several Direct Awards.'**

Paragraph 36: Read and Agreed

**Section Title: 'There were weaknesses in the contract management process.'**

Paragraph 37: To be revised and brought back to the  
Committee.

Paragraph 38: Read and Agreed

**Section Title: 'An Action Plan is in place to address the issues raised.'**

Paragraph 39: To be revised and brought back to the  
Committee.

**Section Title: 'DVA continues to hold significant reserves and income lost due to the impact of Covid 19 has been fully reinstated.'**

Paragraph 40: Read and Agreed

**Agreed:** The Committee noted this concluded the first consideration of the report.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed that the appendices of the report would include:

- Extract from the minutes
- Hansard
- Correspondence.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to schedule a final consideration of the report at next weeks' meeting, 13 May 2021; and it was proposed to launch the report on 3 June 2021.

**Agreed:** The Committee noted a draft press release will be prepared by the Clerk prior to the launch date.



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*Mr David Hilditch MLA left the meeting at 2.44 pm*

*Mr David Hilditch MLA re-joined the meeting at 2.51 pm*

*The Committee remained in Closed session at 2.58 pm*

## **8. Draft Forward Work Programme**

The following officials remained in the meeting:

Mr Kieran Donnelly, CB C&AG;  
Ms Colette Kane, Director, and  
Mr Kyle Bingham, Assembly Support Officer NIAO.

The Committee noted the draft Forward Work Programme covering the period 15 April to 8 July 2021.

The Committee noted the Audit Office are finalising their reports into 'Sports NI Sustainability Funding' and 'Covid Expenditure', and that a possible date for the Committee to hold this inquiry, is mid - June.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed the witnesses for the inquiry into 'Sports NI Sustainability Funding' would be Ms Tracy Meharg, AO DfC and Ms Antoinette McKeown, Chief Executive, Sports NI.

**Agreed:** The Committee agreed to publish the Press Release regarding its recent report 'Impact Review on Special Educational Needs' regarding the Memorandum of Reply received from the Department. The Press Release reflects that All recommendations have been accepted by the Department and that the Committee will be seeking an update from the Department in 6 months' time.



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## **9. Any Other Business**

### **Committee Press Releases**

**Agreed:** The Committee noted the Chair and Clerk have met with the NIA Head of Communications Ms Susie Brown, the Clerk Assistant and Mr Frank Geddis regarding committee press releases.

## **10. Date, Time and Place of Next Meeting**

The next meeting of the Public Accounts Committee will take place on Thursday 13 May 2021, at 2.00 pm in Room 30, Parliament Buildings.

*The meeting adjourned at 3.05 pm.*

**Mr William Humphrey MBE MLA**  
**Chairperson**  
**Public Accounts Committee**  
**6 May 2021**